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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effects of a six-week intensive course on Counseling Women upon attitudes toward the rights and roles of women. The experimental group consisted of 12 students enrolled in this course. The comparison group consisted of 12 students enrolled in a different course, Introduction to Pupil Personnel Services, within the same department. The Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972) served as the pre and posttest measure. A comparison of the pretest scores of both groups indicated that the experimental group was significantly more liberal in its attitudes toward the rights and roles of women than was the comparison group. In addition, a comparison of the pre and posttest scores of both groups indicated that the course was an effective method of significantly liberalizing attitudes toward the rights and roles of women. The control group showed no such significant change in attitudes. (Author)

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The Effects of a Course on Counseling Women, Upon Attitudes Toward the Rights and Roles of Women

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Introduction

This study was designed to explore the effects of one course titled, Planning for Action: Counseling Women, upon attitudes toward the rights and roles of women. The effects of sex-role stereotyping in psychotherapy have only recently been explored. Research (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz & Vogel, 1970; Nickerson, 1976; Rice & Rice, 1973; Schlossberg & Pietrofesa, 1973; and Thomas & Stewart, 1971) suggests that clinicians encourage females with whom they are working to adjust to the traditional view of women which is held by many members of this society. The appropriateness of such a role to a particular female client and the alternatives available to her are often ignored. Broverman et al. (1970) found that psychotherapists viewed the psychologically healthy adult as possessing the traits also attributed to the psychologically healthy male. The psychologically healthy female was expected to function in a manner which was considered psychologically unhealthy for a competent adult. This study provides evidence that clinicians accept the prevailing view of women as "more submissive, less independent, less adventurous, more easily influenced, less aggressive, less competitive, more excitable in minor crises, having their feelings hurt more easily, being more emotional, more conceited about their appearance, less objective" and more likely to "dislike math and science" than are men (Broverman et al., p. 4). As a result, clinicians may explicitly or implicitly perpetuate this stereotype in their interactions with female clients. Rice and Rice (1973) further stated that clinicians may begin to look for signs of psychopathology when a female client expresses marked dissatisfaction with

the traditional female role. Studies by Thomas and Stewart (1971) and Schiossberg and Pietrofesa (1973) found that counseling students were biased against women entering "masculine" occupations. Schlossberg and Pietrofesa (1973) also documented the negative effects of such attitudes and outlined a training model for use by those who instruct counselors. Cline-Naffziger (1974) discussed research on frustration, oppression, stigma and cognitive dissonance in relation to the ways in which they affect the lives of women. The author suggested that justifiable anger may result, which must be better understood by the clinicians from whom many women seek help. Steinmann (1970) pointed out that counselors need to be aware of the conflicts which may arise in young women as they attempt to choose between or combine a career and a family.

However, Gardner (1971) stated that awareness of women's issues is not possible without special training. Clinicians in this society are viewed as incapable of helping female clients evaluate their options and select their own goals without such training. Whether sex-role stereotypes can be modified has been the subject of a group of studies at Boston University (Applegarth, 1975; Bowman & Nickerson, 1976; Dorn, 1975; Gun, 1975; Kesselman, 1974; Nickerson, 1975; Nickerson & Pettus, 1976; Nickerson & Williams, 1974; Shiraishi, 1975; and Speizer, 1975). These authors have focused their work upon the development of intervention strategies designed to change such attitudes in various populations. In addition, Lunneborg (1974) found that a course titled, Psychology of Sex Differences, significantly liberalized the attitudes toward the role of women of only the female students enrolled.

This study was designed to add information to the existing research

regarding the effects of participation in a course designed to focus upon issues related to counseling women upon one variable, attitudes toward the rights and roles of women. It was hypothesized that an increased awareness of the issues involved in counseling women would lead to a significant liberalization in the attitudes toward women held by those enrolled in the course. In addition, it was expected that students choooosing to enroll in this course would be motivated to learn about these issues, and somewhat aware of the biases against women who seek counseling, even prior to the course. It was therefore hypothesized that, prior to the course, the attitudes toward women of those students who enrolled in this course would be significantly more liberal than the attitudes of those students who enrolled in a course titled, Introduction to Pupil Personnel Services, which was taught in the same department.

Method

Subjects

The experimental group was composed of 12 students enrolled in a course titled, Planning for Action: Counseling Women, taught by the junior author. These students volunteered to participate in this study and completed both the pre and posttest forms. They ranged in age from 23 to 35. The mean age was 28. Ten of these subjects were female, one subject was male, and one subject chose not to disclose this information. All subjects were graduate students in the fields of education, liberal arts or human services.

The comparison group was composed of students enrolled in a course titled, Introduction to Pupil Personnel Services. Despite considerable

efforts to secure an adequate comparison group for this study, the pretest and posttest comparison subgroups were two distinct groups. Because of the unannounced and premature termination of this course, posttesting had to be conducted by mail. Hence, of the questionnaires returned, only one had been completed by a subject who initially volunteered to participate in this study and had completed the pretest. The pretest group was composed of eight students, and the posttest group was composed of five students. The subjects ranged in age from 22 to 66. The mean age was 34. Eight subjects were female and four were male. All subjects were graduate students in education, liberal arts or human services, as were those in the experimental group.

A comparison between the experimental and comparative groups indicated no significant differences in sex (see Table 1),

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Insert Table 1

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educational level (see Table 2),

Insert Table 2

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or educational orientation (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3

Instruments

The Attitudes Toward Women Scale, developed by Spence and Helmreich (1972) was employed in this study to measure attitudes toward the rights and roles of women. It was intended by its authors to provide a psychometrically sound instrument for use in empirical studies on the psychology of sex differences, particularly in conjunction with programs in women's studies. The scale contains statements about the rights and roles of women in the following areas: vocational and educational roles; freedom and independence; dating, courtship and etiquette; drinking, swearing, and dirty jokes; sexual behavior; and marital relationships and obligations. A four-point scale indicates the strength of agreement to the presented statements, with higher scores indicative of liberal, profeminist attitudes.

It was initially developed by the authors to compare attitudes of college students with the attitudes of their parents (Spence & Helmreich, 1972). It has also been successful as a pre and posttest measure of change resulting from women's studies courses (Lunneborg, 1974). Research conducted to date indicates that the Attitudes Toward Women Scale is sensitive to age differences and regional differences (Speizer, 1975). It has been found to be a sensitive enough instrument to measure changes in attitudes of subjects who are initially liberal in their views (Lunneborg, 1974).

Procedure

During the first class of each course, the subjects in the experimental and comparison groups were asked to participate in this research. Those who agreed were asked to complete the Attitudes Toward Women Scale and a page

requesting demographic data.

The experimental manipulation was a course on Counseling Women. It was offered during the summer session of 1975, three times weekly for six weeks. Each class was three hours in length. Students received four graduate credits. The format of the course consisted of lectures, guest speakers, films and an experiential component as well. The course was designed "to promote a more comprehensive understanding of women and issues involved in counseling them." Specific areas discussed included the influence of client/counselor sex on the counseling relationship, sex-role stereotypes, women's contemporary development and her changing place in society. In addition, current approaches to counseling women were assessed and new approaches were formulated. The comparison group received no such experimental manipulation. Issues related to sex-role stereotypes and counseling women were not specifically addressed in this course.

The experimental group completed the posttest questionnaires during the last class of the course. Because of the premature termination of the course in which the comparison group pretest data were obtained, all students enrolled in Introduction to Pupil Personnel Services were sent letters requesting their completion of the posttest questionnaires by mail.

Results

The course titled, Counseling Women, was found to liberalize significantly the attitudes toward the rights and roles of women of those students enrolled in the course. A *t*-test for two related samples was conducted, comparing the pre and posttest scores of this group, $t(11) = 2.40$ $p < .05$

(see Table 4). The attitudes toward the rights and roles of women of the comparison group showed no such significant liberalization. A t-test for two independent samples was conducted, comparing the pre and posttest scores of this group, $t(12) = .06$ n.s. (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4

In addition, a comparision of the pretest scores of the experimental and comparison groups indicated that initially, the experimental group was significantly more liberal in its attitudes toward women than the comparison group. A t-test for two independent samples was conducted, comparing the pretest scores of each group, $t(19) = 2.11$ $p < .05$ (see Table 5).

Discussion

This study adds support to previously conducted research (Applegarth, 1975; Bowman & Nickerson, 1976; Dorn, 1975; Gun, 1975; Kesselman, 1974; Lunneborg, 1974; Nickerson, 1975; Nickerson & Williams, 1974; Shiraishi, 1975; and Speizer, 1975), which indicates that attitudes toward the rights and roles of women can be modified by courses focusing upon various aspects of women's issues. Changes in attitudes resulting from a course specifically designed to help professionals counsel women in a more effective manner, however, have not been documented prior to this study. The attitudes of those enrolled in such a course are particularly important, since many of the students will be working directly with women in counseling relationships.

An understanding of the difficulties some women face because of sex-role stereotyping and the biases against them is crucial in order for a clinician to help women understand their options. A flexible, liberal attitude, toward the rights and roles of women is necessary, if the counselor hopes to help female clients explore these options in a nonjudgmental manner.

It is also apparent that attitudes toward the rights and roles of women can be modified in a short period of time. This study indicates that a six-week intensive course dealing specifically with issues related to counseling women has a liberalizing effect upon these attitudes.

However, the comparison between the pretest scores of both groups in this study indicates that those students who chose to enroll in Counseling Women were already comparatively liberal in their views of the rights and roles of women. It appears that those students who may be most in need of such a course, those who view women in a traditional manner, may not choose to participate in such a course. The result may be that such courses will only be effective with a limited number of students who are already somewhat aware of and choose to confront the issues addressed in this type of course unless efforts are made to bring this crucial subject matter to the attention of all students. It is felt that such a curriculum experience as that contained in this course should be required of all students. In addition to this course, Applegarth (1975) has designed and evaluated a one-day workshop for counselors in training, and Schlossberg and Pietrofesa (1973) have designed a one-week workshop with follow-up over a six-month period.

Lastly, it is suggested that research be conducted on a larger scale, with follow-up over time, and with other courses related to women's issues.

More evidence about the nature and long-term effects of such courses are needed.

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Table 1

Sex Distribution of the Experimental and Comparison Groups

	Males	Females	Total
Experimental	1 (2.5)*	11 (9.5)	12
Comparison	4 (2.5)	8 (9.5)	12
Total	5	19	24

*observed (expected) $\chi^2 = .66$, df = 1, $p > .05$ n.s.

Table 2

Educational Levels of Experimental and Comparison Groups

	Bachelors Degree	Masters Degree	Unspecified	Total
Experimental	8 (9.36)*	4 (3.12)	1 (.52)	13
Comparison	10 (8.64)	2 (2.88)	0 (.48)	12
Total	18	6	1	25

*observed (expected) $\chi^2 = 1.85$, df = 2, $p > .05$ n.s.

Table 3

Educational Orientation of Experimental and Comparison Groups

	Education	Liberal Arts	Human Services	Unspecified	Total
Experimental	3 (4.16)*	1 (1.04)	7 (5.20)	2 (2.60)	13
Comparison	5 (3.84)	1 (.96)	3 (4.80)	3 (2.40)	12
Total	8	2	10	5	25

*observed (expected) $\chi^2 = 2.26$, df = 3, $p > .05$ n.s.

Table 4

Pre to Posttest Experimental and Comparison Group

Attitude Toward Women (AWS) Scores

	Pre AWS M, s.d.	Post AWS M, s.d.	t	< p
Experimental	144.25 (7.75)	147.92 (7.18)	2.40[1]	.05
Comparison	125.63 (19.04)	125.00 (11.88)	.06[2]	n.s.

[1] t-test for related samples

[2] t-test for independent samples